

'We're just getting started': Aurora launch pad for road tennis in Ontario

Indigenous sport in Barbados to be included in York Region District School Board curriculum

By **Laura Bradley** Aurora Banner

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Road tennis, an indigenous sport in Barbados, is a cross between table and lawn tennis. It will be introduced as part of the curriculum for some elementary schools in the York Region District School Board as a pilot project. - YRDSB screenshot/Laura Broadle



The game that started almost 100 years ago on the streets of Barbados, with courts drawn out on tar or cement and vines or chalk used to mark boundaries, is now making its way into the classrooms of the York Region District School Board.

Road tennis, an indigenous sport in Barbados, has developed into a competitive game played on bright blue and green courts by two players using wooden rackets to hit a ball over an eight-inch net. It gained traction through people in impoverished communities who wanted to play a game similar to lawn tennis or table tennis, according to [Barbados Tourism](#).

Although it has humble beginnings, the game has developed sophisticated rules and officiating structures, and is played competitively by athletes who aspire to gain the title of road tennis champion, according to Barbados Tourism.

In one of his visits to Barbados, where he had worked with the government on sport tourism initiatives, Ron Weese, president of Sport Aurora and town councillor, encountered road tennis and it immediately caught his attention.

“I was intrigued by its unique nature and the fact that it’s a sport that grew out of the streets of Barbados,” he said. “The fact that it’s relatively inexpensive to get underway was important.”

Road tennis is easy and fun to play, but it’s not so easy to master, Weese said.

Bringing the sport to elementary schools made the most sense because that’s where every child goes, giving each student a chance to try it, Weese added.

Weese, along with Barbados ex-patriot and Aurora resident Ron Kellman, approached the school board about including the sport in the curriculum.

Road tennis will be introduced through a pilot project for the 2023-24 year in several YRDSB elementary schools within the [identity-affirming health and physical education](#) curriculum. Students will be given instruction in the sport itself as well as learn about the cultural significance of road tennis in Barbados.

“It’s great exercise, it’s a great workout. It has the equity, diversity and inclusiveness in it,” Kellman said.

Kellman has been working with the government of Barbados, which wanted to export the sport around the world but didn’t have the resources to do that, he said.

“I called on my friends and said, ‘We have an opportunity to do something really special.’ How often do you get to be on the forefront of something?” Kellman said. “We’re just getting started.”

A road tennis demonstration was held during the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame 2022 induction gala, where it was an “immediate success,” said president Mark Gravett.

“It was a natural for us to continue to work with local representatives and the Government of Barbados to extend this experience.”

Both Weese and Kellman said one of the motivating factors to bring road tennis to Canada is the opportunity to be at the forefront of a sport they hope will gain international traction and eventually be an official sport at the Olympics.

When Carl James, a professor at York University, heard about the introduction of road tennis in the YRDSB curriculum, he initially wanted to know what the board was trying to accomplish and questioned if the sport would help reach that goal.

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“In addition to the game and the program, what else (is the school board) going to put in place to affirm the presence of these students of Barbadian background? It cannot be just simply, let’s put in this sport and therefore it’s going to help affirm the students,” he said.

James said it’s important teachers are also supportive of students and their engagement in the schooling system.

“Will you also start developing curriculum that will speak to the experiences of Black students beyond the game?”

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Road tennis, an indigenous sport in Barbados, is being introduced at some elementary schools in the York Region District School Board this school year as part of its Identity-affirming health and physical education program. We thought it was important to explore the potential impact it will have on students.

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